



# Traffic Safety Facts 1999

## Young Drivers



There were 187.2 million licensed drivers in the United States in 1999. Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.8 percent (12.7 million) of the total, a 1.2 percent decrease from the 12.8 million young drivers in 1989.

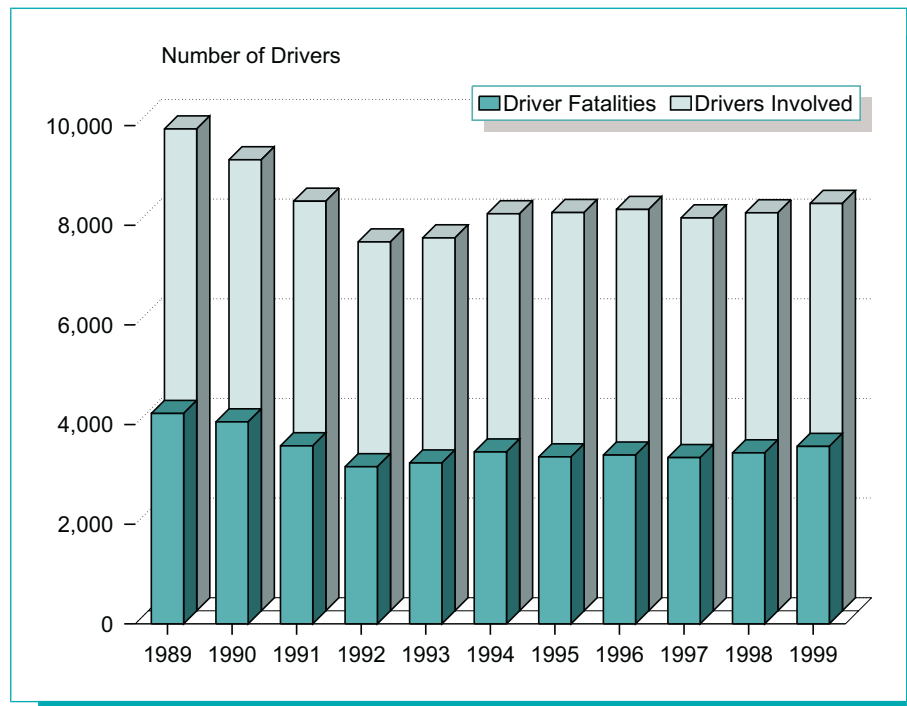
In 1999, 8,175 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes — a 15 percent decrease from the 9,671 involved in 1989. Driver fatalities for this age group decreased by 16 percent between 1989 and 1999. For young males, driver fatalities dropped by 20 percent, compared with a 3 percent decrease for young females (Table 3).

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds (based on 1997 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 1999, 3,561 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed, and an additional 362,000 were injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

In 1999, 15 percent (8,175) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (56,352) were young drivers 15 to 20 years old, and 18 percent (1,964,000) of all the drivers involved in police-reported crashes (11,194,000) were young drivers.

**“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people from 15 to 20 years old.”**

**Figure 1. Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old, 1989-1999**



**Table 1. Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes and Driver Involvement Rates by Age Group, 1999**

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
1999 Population (Percent)	8.7	5.2	13.9	16.4	13.1	8.6	3.5	9.2
Drivers Involved in 1999 Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
Single-Vehicle	18.5	12.4	22.1	19.1	12.0	7.0	2.4	6.2
Multi-Vehicle	12.5	8.8	20.6	20.3	14.9	9.0	3.2	10.4
All Fatal Crashes	14.7	10.1	21.1	19.8	13.9	8.3	2.9	8.9
1999 Licensed Drivers (Percent)	6.8	6.7	19.6	22.3	18.6	11.8	4.5	9.9
Drivers Involved in 1999 Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers	64.6	45.0	32.0	26.4	22.2	20.9	19.5	26.7

***“In 1999, 15 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old.”***

More than one-third (383) of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had an invalid operator’s license at the time of the crash also had a previous license suspension or revocation. For the same age group, 29 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 1999 had been drinking (Table 4).

**Table 2. Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 1999**

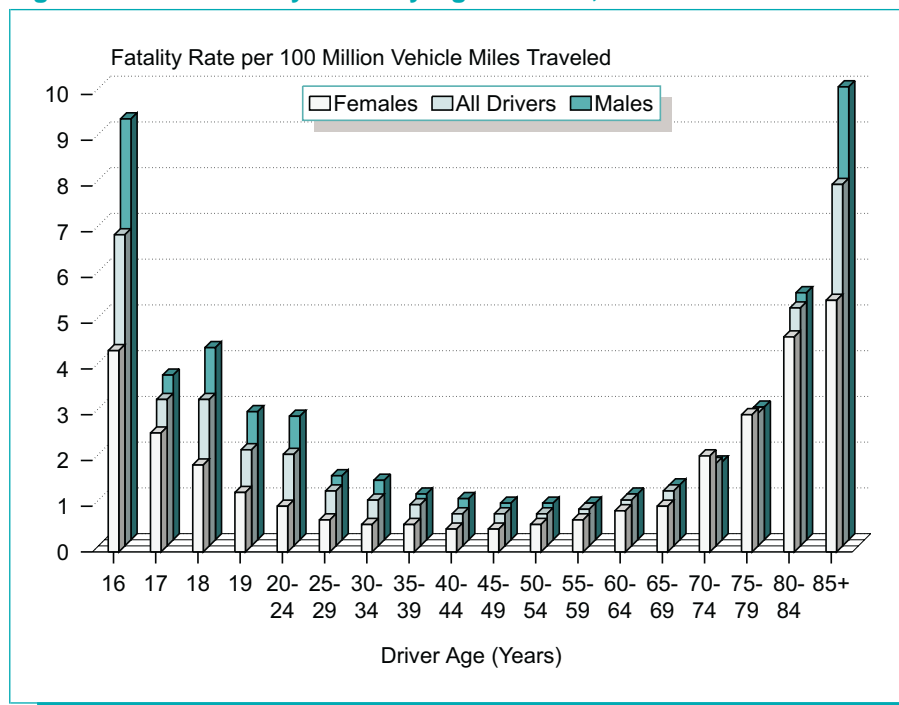
Driving Record	License Status					
	Valid (6,997)		Invalid (1,096)		Total (8,175)*	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	1,165	16.6	131	13.3	1,296	17.2
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	492	7.0	383	38.9	875	11.0
Previous DWI Convictions	77	1.1	84	8.5	161	2.0
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,639	23.4	219	22.3	1,858	23.3
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Conviction	1,283	18.4	243	24.7	1,526	19.1

\*Includes 82 drivers with unknown license status.

In 1999, the estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old was \$32.2 billion.

When driver fatality rates are calculated on the basis of estimated annual travel, the highest rates are found among the youngest and oldest drivers. Compared with the fatality rate for drivers 25 through 69 years old, the rate for teenage drivers (16 to 19 years old) is about 4 times as high, and the rate for drivers in the oldest group is 9 times as high.

Figure 2. Driver Fatality Rates by Age and Sex, 1994



**“The fatality rate for teenage drivers, based on estimated annual travel, is about 4 times as high as the rate for drivers 25 through 69 years old.”**

Female drivers under age 50 have a lower fatality rate than their male counterparts, on a per mile driven basis, while the rate is essentially the same for both male and female drivers over 50 years of age, with the exception of the oldest group (Figure 2).

Table 3. Involvement of Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old in Fatal Crashes, 1989 and 1999

	1989			1999			Percentage Change, 1989-1999		
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Number		Percentage Age 15-20
							Total	Age 15-20	
<i>Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes</i>									
Total	60,435	9,671	16.0	56,352	8,175	14.5	-7%	-15%	-9%
Male	45,448	7,242	15.9	40,900	5,797	14.2	-10%	-20%	-11%
Female	14,054	2,429	17.3	14,792	2,378	16.1	+5%	-2%	-7%
<i>Driver Fatalities</i>									
Total	26,389	4,222	16.0	25,210	3,561	14.1	-4%	-16%	-12%
Male	20,012	3,153	15.8	18,449	2,528	13.7	-8%	-20%	-13%
Female	6,376	1,069	16.8	6,755	1,033	15.3	+6%	-3%	-9%

### Motorcycles

During 1999, 163 young motorcycle drivers (15-20 years old) were killed and an additional 6,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 29 percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 551 motorcyclists of all ages in 1999, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 326 lives could have been saved.

During 1999, 45 percent of the motorcycle drivers between 15 and 20 years old who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets.

Of the young motorcycle drivers involved in fatal crashes in 1999, more than one-fourth (27 percent) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

### Alcohol

NHTSA defines a fatal traffic crash as being *alcohol-related* if either a driver or a nonoccupant (e.g., pedestrian) had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.01 grams per deciliter (g/dl) or greater in a police-reported traffic crash. Persons with a BAC of 0.10 g/dl or greater involved in fatal crashes are considered to be *intoxicated*. This is the legal limit of intoxication in most states.

In 1999, 21 percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.

**Table 4. Alcohol Involvement Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes, 1999**

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	Percentage with BAC Levels		
		0.00 g/dl	0.01-0.09 g/dl	≥0.10 g/dl
Surviving	4,614	86	7	7
Fatally Injured	3,561	71	8	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,175</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>

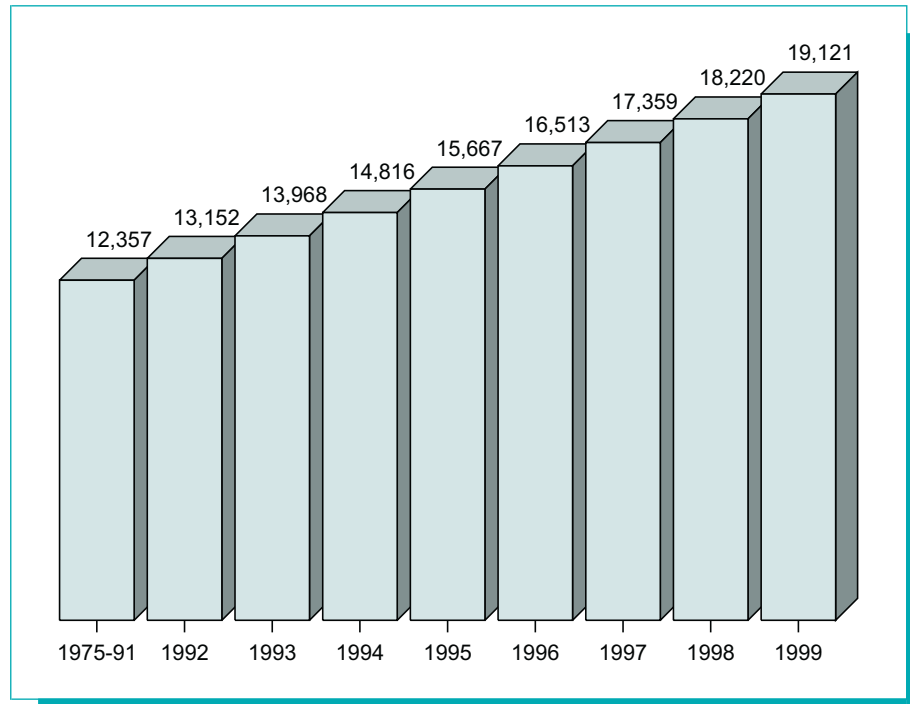
The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 1999, 3 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 4 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 21 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

The numbers of drivers 15 to 20 years old involved in fatal crashes who were intoxicated dropped by 41 percent between 1989 and 1999.

**“In 1999, 21 percent of the young drivers who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.”**

All states and the District of Columbia now have 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws. NHTSA estimates that these laws have reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 19,121 lives since 1975. In 1999, an estimated 901 lives were saved by minimum drinking age laws. Seventeen states have set 0.08 g/dl as the legal intoxication limit, and all states plus the District of Columbia have zero tolerance laws for drivers under the age of 21 (it is illegal for drivers under 21 to drive with BAC levels of 0.02 g/dl or greater).

**Figure 3. Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-1999**



***“NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 19,121 lives since 1975.”***

For young drivers 15 to 20 years old, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 1999, 24 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 11 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 1999, 73 percent of the young drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 79 percent were unrestrained.

**For more information:**

Information on young drivers is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NRD-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. NCSA information can also be obtained by telephone or by fax-on-demand at 1-800-934-8517. FAX messages should be sent to (202) 366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/ncsa>. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.